

# Hepatitis – The Silent Epidemic

**DOVER** – The state Division of Public Health (DPH) encourages baby boomers, or individuals born between 1945 and 1965, to speak to their doctor about getting tested for hepatitis. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), approximately 3.2 million Americans have chronic hepatitis C virus (HCV) and another 1.2 million have chronic hepatitis B virus (HBV). Hepatitis B and C are spread primarily through contact with the blood of an infected person. Baby boomers account for 75 percent of all living hepatitis C cases, and 50 percent of people with hepatitis C don't even know they are infected. Testing could identify up to one million individuals in the U.S. who do not currently know they are infected.

Known as the “silent epidemic,” most chronically infected individuals will have few or no symptoms until life-threatening complications such as liver cancer or end-stage liver disease develop – typically years after initial infection. Injection drug use is known to play a major role in HCV transmission. The CDC has noted increases in hepatitis cases in states where IV drug use has also increased. People become infected by sharing needles or other equipment used to inject drugs. Prior to 1992, when widespread screening of the blood supply began in the United States, hepatitis B and C were also commonly spread through blood transfusions and organ transplants.

Hepatitis A and B are vaccine-preventable diseases, whereas hepatitis C has no vaccine. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has approved new medications for the treatment of chronic hepatitis C virus (HCV) infection, which can now cure the disease. Hepatitis A occurs much less frequently in the United States and is more common in countries with poor

sanitation. Most people recover with no lasting liver damage and the disease is rarely fatal.

If you're not sure if you're at risk for hepatitis, visit the DPH hepatitis web page, and take the [five-minute risk assessment](#).

For more information, or to report a hepatitis C case, call DPH's Adult Viral Hepatitis program at 302-744-1050.

A person who is deaf, hard-of-hearing, deaf-blind or speech-disabled can call the DPH phone number above by using TTY services. Dial 7-1-1 or 800-232-5460 to type your conversation to a relay operator, who reads your conversation to a hearing person at DPH. The relay operator types the hearing person's spoken words back to the TTY user. To learn more about TTY availability in Delaware, visit <http://delawarerelay.com>.

Delaware Health and Social Services is committed to improving the quality of the lives of Delaware's citizens by promoting health and well-being, fostering self-sufficiency, and protecting vulnerable populations. DPH, a division of DHSS, urges Delawareans to make healthier choices with the 5-2-1 Almost None campaign: eat 5 or more fruits and vegetables each day, have no more than 2 hours of recreational screen time each day (includes TV, computer, gaming), get 1 or more hours of physical activity each day, drink almost no sugary beverages.